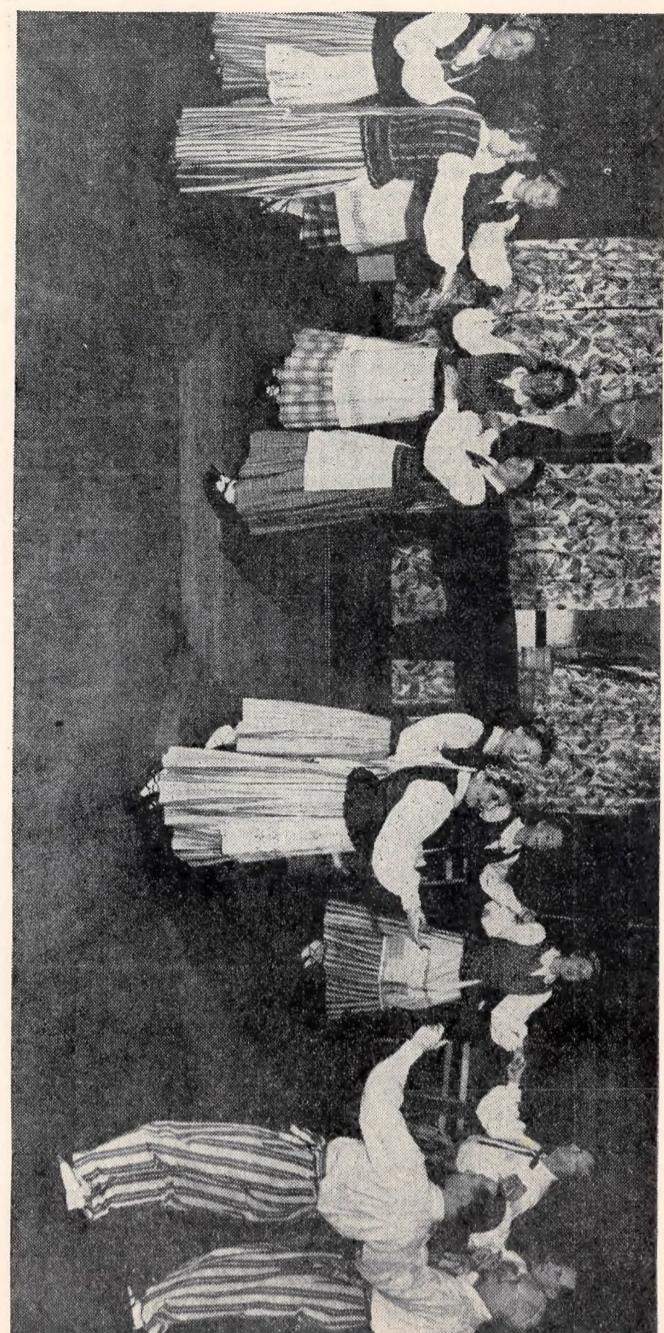


JUDEO-ISRAELI DANCES

(This article appeared in the 1949 Annual of the College of Jewish Studies)



Dancing, in ancient times, among all people, played an important part in their daily lives, whether for social needs or religiously solemn purposes. The same is true of the ancient Hebrews. The Pentateuch, considered the oldest written document of the Hebrew old testament books, speaks of dancing too. Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, danced. In later periods the dancing is mentioned more often. We know that dancing was a part of the religious ritual in the Beth ha-mikdash — the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

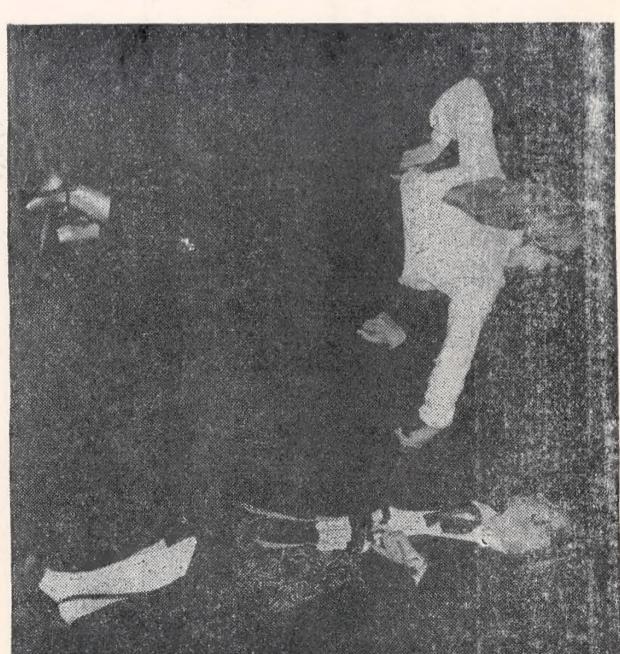
We do not know the type of dancing the Jews did in those days. The prohibition laid down in the Ten Commandments against graven images deprived posterity of paintings which would give us some idea of the form of posture of the old Jewish dance. With the destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylonia, as the Jews hung up their lyres upon the willows and wept, we read no more of dancing. But we can state with certainty that dancing did not cease as a means of joyous expression on such occasions as weddings, "Milah's" (Circumcision), "Pidyon haben" (Redemption of the first born), "Bar Mitzvah" (Confirmation), etc. However, the Jewish dance was not universal anymore. In each country the Jews danced differently, influenced by the environment of the native populations in the lands of their dispersion.

Today, the Jewish dance can be classified in five main categories: 1) The Jewish dances of the European (except Hassidic) and American Jews; 2) the Hassidic dance of semi-religious ecstasy of the Jews of Poland; 3) the Yemenite, Ladino and other Oriental Jewish; 4) the Palestinian dance of pre-Israel Period; and 5) the Israeli period.

In some countries where the Jewish population was heavily concentrated, as was the case in Poland where the Hassidim lived, the dance acquired a character which is considered Jewish. To less extent this was true of the Jews of Russia and the Balkans. In the Orient, only the Yemenite Jews developed a form of dance which, though Oriental in every phase, is, nevertheless, to be considered Jewish. It is a type of dance, however, which is much too strange and difficult for the Western Jew to master and feel at home.

The most common type of dance among the Eastern European Jews was the "Fraileach". Fraileach means, happy or joyous. During any happy event the participants said to the fiddlers: "Shpelt mir klaysmornlach epes fraileach." (Play for me musicians, something joyous), and the musicians, played as the guests danced. The Fraileach type of dance was simple; for the most part it was a fast walk. The entire wedding party could participate as it required to follow the leader who led them through various floor patterns. These patterns are not original with the Jews, since they are a primitive type of dance that are likewise done by many other nations, ancient and modern (the Farandole-Farandula type of the French and Basques, simplified grand marches, Balkan serpentine dances and the Polonaise of the Polish gentry and Russian royal courts). The Jews created dozens of Fraileach tunes, all bearing strong Roumanian-Moldavian influence.

In Russia (pre-world War I), besides the many Russian ballroom dances which they adopted (Pas d'Espan, Alexandrovka, the Polish Krakowiak), the Jews also received in my mail the "American Squares" magazine. In it, under the titled article "The Southern California Miss Marie Witkay. Treasurer: Art Herman.



The type of costume a Hassid would wear. Dark colors for the man. Due to a biblical injunction they do not cut facial growth and the ear-locks (Peyot) is one of their marks of distinction. Underneath the coat they also wear a four cornered cloth, called "Tzitzit" whose four corners have a cluster of threads knotted and wound in a certain prescribed manner. These "Tzitzit" which every male must wear, is considered sacred, and the threads are held during prayer. The above picture is of Vytis Beliajus and Miss Ethel Jacobson.

SYD GIVES CAL. SQUARE DANCERS ORAL SPEAKING

Sydney J. Harris, trouble — shooting and fault — finding columnist of the Chicago Daily News, the city's respected daily, devoted his December 20th column

"raising Cain" with Californian Square Dancers — "after spending a few weeks in California this summer."

Says Syd: "One frenzied experience with the square dance (I still get shortness of breath when I think of it) made

seem as tame and decorous as a Saturday afternoon tattooing party at Aunt Mathilda's. resembling a cross between a bacchanalia and a Notre Dame scrimmage.

Each dance last 20 minutes, or until the callers voice grows hoarse. You are constantly tripping and twirling, grinning foolishly into strange faces, bumping buttocks with wild indifference, and dripping more saliva than

the entire Pony Express after a hard day's run."

"There is no respite from this terpsichorean torture,not even opportunity to tuck in your shirttails as they keep creeping up toward the 50-yards line Then, for diversion, they do a little thing called a toe-end-heel dance, where all the men and women line up facing one another, tap their toes, then their heels, curtsey and bow, spin around, shake hands, and reel over to the next partner. After this gets going in full stride, the

room becomes just a floating nightmare of doughy faces, fetid breaths, limp hands, rubbery legs and glazed eyes."

For a fleeting hour I thought that Sidney J. Harris must be exaggerating. But that very same morning I received in my mail the "American Squares" magazine.

Greater St. Louis Folk Dance Federation. President: Kenneth Lissant. Vice-President: J. R. Scott. Recording Secretary: Mrs. W. Wirtzel. Corresponding Secretary: Miss Marie Witkay. Treasurer: Art Herman.